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Reflections

Blacks in dystopia: 1969–1971

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Abstract

This article tests Tom Moylan's notion of the critical utopia against science fiction works published at the height of America's 20th century racial conflict, 1969–1971. The notion of utopia is an inherently political concept since it uses fantasy to suggest solutions to problems of the day. Traditional American utopias paid scant attention to racial difference. In critical utopia, race and inter-racial conflict is acknowledged and solutions are proposed. Texts analyzed here acknowledge the conflict but pose no solutions. Rather, they exhibit fear of the change in the racial order then underway.

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1. Introduction

Tom Moylan employs the imagery of Rev. Dr Martin Luther King, Jr's 1963 'I have a dream' statement to introduce the concept of the critical utopia. In his book, *Demand the Impossible: Science Fiction and the Utopian Imagination*, Moylan says, "A central concern in the critical utopia is the awareness of the limitations of the utopian traditions, so that these texts reject utopia as a blueprint while preserving it as a dream" [16].¹ This contrasts sharply with traditional understandings of utopia. Lyman T. Sargent, editor of *Utopian Studies*, journal of The Society of Utopian Studies, says that

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¹ Moylan's use of King's statement is unusual since opposite to it on the page is written 'Martin Luther King' despite the fact that it was Martin Luther King, Jr who uttered this well-known phrase. Moylan never explicitly quotes anything more from Rev. King but, rather, implies through his narrative why the King's statement is invoked. It appears that Moylan believes the meaning of 'I have a dream' to be well known to his readers.

The word utopia, as coined by [Thomas] More [in 1516], means nowhere and implies nothing relevant to the quality of that nowhere. Utopia may be used as the general term covering all the various classes of utopian literature. Eutopia—although the word has unfortunately fallen out of favor—or the positive utopia refer to presentations of good places. Dystopia or the negative utopia refers to presentations of bad places [20].

However, the ‘deep conflicts of the 1960’s,’ says Moylan, led authors to imagine utopias that were not perfect societies. The spirit of conflicts,

those uprisings, coded around the year 1968 but springing from the oppositions of the 1950s and late 1940s, might have been defeated by state suppression or contained by ideological reduction to individual narcissism, hip-capitalism, or even ‘Clean for Gene [McCarthy]’ reformism...survived in a continuing activism that marked a return to the human agenda of the categories of cooperation, equality, mutual aid, liberation, ecological wisdom, and peaceful and creative living. This revived longing for the not yet realized potential of the human community was expressed in many ways in the emerging oppositional culture of the late 1960s and the 1970s [17].²

Utopian scholar, Ashlie Lancaster, observes that “most utopian thinkers focus on the critical capacity of the positing of ideals in questioning and challenging our existing social arrangements, norms, structures, and institutions” [7]. Unlike previous utopian writing, however, critical utopias include “expressions of oppositional thought, unveiling, debunking, of both the genre itself and the historical situation” in their search for ‘the human community’. Moylan believes Reverend King dreamt of: Critical utopias are fictional works about societies in transition. They are wholly neither eutopias nor dystopias but contain aspects of both. They show conflict between the original and utopian societies and highlight “the continuing presence of difference

² Although Moylan does not define the ‘human community’ specifically, he does appear to support the 1960s, “vision of justice and economic democracy as well as minimal government, individual and group freedom, decentralist ideals, and localist claims [that] has been expressed in documents such as the *Port Huron Statement*, the founding manifesto of the Students for a Democratic Society and Martin Luther King’s ‘I have a Dream’ speech.”(p. 199). Such views are consistent with King’s varied descriptions of goals for human community. In *The Political Philosophy of Martin Luther King, Jr* (Walton, Hanes. *The Political Philosophy of Martin Luther King, Jr* Westport: Greenwood Press, 1971), Hanes Walton notes King’s emphasis on non-violence to ‘reestablish the wholeness of community, reconcile the oppressor with the oppressed and create a brotherhood of blacks and whites,’ in the creation of the ‘beloved community’. In his last book, *Where Do We go From Here: Chaos or Community*, (King, Martin Luther, Jr *Where Do We go From Here: Chaos or Community*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1967) King called for ‘a world-wide fellowship that lifts neighborly concern beyond one’s tribe, race, class and nation’ (p. 190).

and imperfection within utopian society itself...”[19].³ With these characteristics of the critical utopia, as Lancaster says, “Utopia is no longer the construction of an ideal society but rather a tool for criticism of the present, rendering irrelevant its attainability” [8].

While Moylan dates the critical utopia from the 1970s, texts addressed here were written at the nadir of 20th century American race relations, 1967–1970, when African Americans burned central cities from Newark, New Jersey to Los Angeles, California; Dr Martin Luther King, Jr was assassinated; and Black groups such as the Nation of Islam and the Republic of New Africa demanded sovereign Black states in the American South. How were Blacks imagined within the utopian writings at the very beginning of this new period, just after the death of King and the rebellious actions, often termed ‘riots’, that followed?

The texts examined were chosen because they are utopias that have as their central focus socio-political relations between Blacks and whites and were published soon after the death of Rev. Dr Martin Luther King, Jr and the urban unrest that followed his death. All are listed in Lyman T. Sargent’s bibliography, *British And American Utopian Literature, 1516–1975*. Five works are examined: ‘The Lost Continent,’ and *Bug Jack Barron* by Norman Spinrad; ‘Nobody Lives on Burton Street,’ by Gregory Benford; *The Day Of The Drones*, by A.M. Lightner; and ‘How the Whip Came Back,’ by Gene Wolfe. The objective here is not to examine the fears, hopes, expectations and/or suppositions of authors testing the limits of possible racial futures for America. Rather, the intention is to explore the structural relations between Blacks and the rest of America envisioned by the authors. The central question is: Do these authors imagine attainment of the ‘human community’? Secondarily, do these works meet Moylan’s criteria for the critical utopia?

Four basic themes emerge in these works, and because of them the fit with Moylan’s critical utopia seems greatly strained: (1) through ineptitude, whites have all but destroyed the planet; (2) animosity between blacks and whites continues; (3) those Blacks who survived are intellectually inferior whites; and (4) creation of the ‘human community’ encounters near-term imagined challenges.

‘How the Whip Came Back,’ addresses Blacks and race only by implication. ‘Whip’ shows how the world’s dominant powers, after a major economic catastrophe, turn away from charity and religion in favor of combined government–industry lead-

³ In *Scraps of the Untainted Sky*, (Moylan, Tom, Boulder: Perseus, 2000). Moylan provides detailed analysis of the development of utopian literature over the entire 20th century. While such detail is beyond the scope of the present paper Moylan sees the critical utopia as one among other responses by utopian authors to the socio-political conditions of the late 1960s. An ‘anti-utopian’ response, which celebrated the power of the individual, was mounted by right-leaning authors. In contrast, says Moylan, critical utopias were “part of the Left oppositional culture of the time. To be sure their primary base rested in a combination of socialist and radical feminist thought and practice; however, the connection with and influence of the other strands of the opposition were also to be found in these dangerous utopian visions. The anti-racist and liberatory analyses of national, racial, and ethnic liberation struggles; the socialist/communist analyses of the new left; the pacifist existentialist thought of the counter-culture, the anti-draft, and gay and lesbian fronts; and the new scientific work of the ecology movement all fed into these literary interventions.” (p. 81).

ership. Miss Bushnan, a Radcliffe graduate and American charity worker, is a non-voting delegate to the United Nations Conference on Human Value in Geneva. Dreams of her husband, Brad, who is in prison, are interrupted by a visit from His Holiness Pope Honorius V, also a non-voting delegate. He says to her:

The delegates caucused this afternoon after the public session. They decided to ask for our votes at the final meeting.

‘Us?’ Miss Bushnan was nonplused. ‘The observers?’

Yes. The votes will have no legal validity, of course. They cannot be counted. But they want total unanimity—they want to get us down on the record.

‘I see,’ said Miss Bushnan.

Church and charity. People surrendered their faith in us to put it in the governments, but they’re losing that now, and the delegates sense it. Perhaps the faith won’t return to us, but there’s a chance it might.

And so I’m to be wine and dine.

The Pope nodded. ‘And courted too, I should imagine. The French are very enthused about this; their penal system has been at loose ends ever since they lost their African colonies over fifty years ago.’ [41].

Bushnan and the Pope are undecided which way to vote, but Bushnan is prodded to vote ‘yes’ by the French, the USSR, and the United States—which offers a personal enticement. The US delegation believes the results of this vote will return the US to world preeminence. The American delegate advises,

Miss Bushnan, there are close to a quarter of a million men and women in state and federal prisons today, and to maintain each of them there costs—costs us, Miss Bushnan, the taxpayers—five thousand dollars a year each...[I]f half the federal and state prisoners could be leased out to private owners at five thousand a year, the revenue would take care of the remaining half [42].

She replies,

‘Are you still going to call them slaves?’ The U.S. delegate replies enthusiastically, ‘Oh, yes...People like the idea of having slaves; robots have gotten us used to it and tranquilizers and anti-aggressants have made it practical; what’s more, it’s a link with the past at a time when too many such links are phasing out...The United States...having the highest crime rate among major nations...will be an exporter in this market...’ [43].

To sweeten the deal he offers a romantic suggestion; Miss Bushnan ‘could lease Brad from the government...You would have him, he would have you, and your government would be twenty-five thousand dollars to the better as the direct result of your happiness’ [44].

While race is not spelled out for most characters in ‘Whip’, statistics on Blacks in prison have only worsened since 1969. Given this fact, today’s racial profiling controversy, and the complaints of discriminatory treatment of even wealthy Blacks, it is hard to imagine this situation more than a very tenuous utopia for the most elite African American.

‘The Lost Continent,’ and *The Day Of The Drones* display near global destruction at the hands of short-sighted whites who lost control of their technology. In ‘The Lost Continent,’ America became a ‘saturation smog’-filled land following a Panic in which people fled the US en masse or hermetically sealed themselves below ground, for example, in the New York City subways. For 200 years gas masks have been scant protection from the poisonous American atmosphere. All the glorious machines of America’s Space Age—cars, airplanes, space ships—have rusted in place.

Tourism is New York City’s main industry, but the two biggest attractions are the New Jersey entrance to New York City where the rusted remains of a massive traffic jam, clogging all eight lanes of the Jersey Turnpike are deemed, a ‘minor work of Space Age man!’ by Ryan, the tour guide [21].

Below ground are the deformed descendants of the original Space Agers, the Subway dwellers. They are generally under five feet tall, have stooped shoulders and thin, rickety, emaciated bodies clothed only in filthy scraps. These were “direct descendants of die-hard Space Agers who had atmosphere-sealed the subways and set up a closed ecology inside rather than abandon New York...”[27]. Their mental capacity and ability to communicate were greatly diminished over the centuries.

In *Day Of The Drones*, Amahara, the young protagonist, has to memorize the Sacred Law:

In the beginning there was a great Disaster...And fire on land and death in the sea and the air. And the cities were destroyed and the people were annihilated and the lands were made desolate.

And everything that went before was lost to man, in building and learning and knowledge.

And this crime against God and man was committed by the white people. They were the rulers of the world [11].

To avoid repeat of said crimes, Amahara’s people established a series of elaborate taboos: No large cities, no flying or motorized machines, no huge buildings. “The greatest taboo,” says Don Waldi, Amahara’s teacher, “is against interfamily quarrels, inter-tribal strife. We have prohibited any war of clan against clan, race against race. But we are struggling to build a new world for man...” [14].

There is yet another taboo of more sinister proportion. In opposition to the real-world Civil Rights norm, Lightner presents Blacks, not whites, as the racists. Amahara's homeland, isolated in the mountains of Africa, is the only place on Earth known to have been spared poisonous nuclear radiation. Amahara is a very lucky girl.

Because I was the darkest of the children, it was always understood that I would receive the most education and would rise highest in the state [12].

Her people have instituted a taboo against light-skinned children, however, for fear they will repeat the white people's crimes. Amahara's mother explains why her cousin, N'Gobi, will not be allowed to gain higher education.

...N'Gobi is very lucky that he was born now. A hundred, or even fifty years ago he wouldn't have been allowed to grow up. As soon as his coloring was apparent, he would have been liquidated [13].

Africa and racial animus is also central in 'Lost'. America now survives on the tourist dollars furnished mostly by visiting Africans. This does not sit well with the natives (remaining white Americans). Ryan, the white guide for the all-African tour says:

I keep telling my wife I gotta get out of this tourist business. In the Good Old Days, our ancestors would've given these African brothers nothing but about eight feet of rope. They'd've shot off a nuclear missile and blasted all those black brothers to atoms! If the damn brothers didn't have so much loose money, I'd be for riding every one of them back to Africa on a rail, just like the Space Agers did with their black brothers before the Panic [23].

And it happens that a descendant of one of those banished 'black brothers' is in Ryan's tour group. Michael Lamumba is described by Dr Balewa, Professor of American History at an African University, as 'an intense young man whose great bush of hair, stylized dashiki and gold earring proclaimed that he was an Amero-African' [24]. Each time Ryan glorifies the accomplishments of the Space Agers Lamumba replies something like, 'Stupid arrogant honkie!' This causes the professor to lament

Of course the Amero-Africans are famous for this sort of tastelessness, but to be actually confronted with this sort of blatant racism made one for a moment ashamed to be black [25].

Lamumba's remarks caused Ryan to muse, 'No wonder so many of [Lamumba's] ancestors were lynched by the Space Agers!' [26].

Spinrad shows Black Americans rejected by both whites and Africans due to what seems an unjustified bitterness against white America that has festered these 200 years. Had Spinrad placed this bitterness in the historical context of American slavery

or the struggles of the Civil Rights movement, some justification may have been accorded it.

In both these works, although the Africans' homeland has survived the holocaust, Africans remain keenly aware of their intellectual inferiority to whites. Two hundred years after the Panic, even the Professor is awed:

We may claim that we have not repeated the American feat of going to the Moon because it was part of the overdevelopment that destroyed Space Age civilization, but few reputable scientists would seriously contend that we could go to the Moon if we so chose... Twentieth century American man had a level of scientific knowledge and technological sophistication that we may not fully attain for another century [22].

In *Drones*, African elders have secreted a few machines, e.g. a helicopter, for 500 years and have instituted a taboo against ancient science and technology—especially physics and mechanics. For this entire time, infants lighter in skin-color than a designated norm were killed to prevent rebirth of the evil white race that destroyed the planet. However, a fluke allows one light-skinned man, N'Gobi, Amahara's cousin, to attain manhood. Forbidden advanced education, he still turns out to be a genius at mechanics. He repairs and flies the helicopter which has remained dormant for 500 years.

With N'Gobi at the controls Amahara, her brother, a medical doctor, a village wise man, and an agent of the Wansan (Chief) set off to find the origin of a remarkable, clearly man-made snare attached to a duck not native to their area. The trek takes them from Africa to England where they rescue Evan, a white savage, from the white, matriarchal society that made the snare. Amahara and Evan fall in love and he and N'Gobi save the travelers when the matriarch tries to have them killed. Evan has less formal education than even N'Gobi but Amahara relates that

N'Gobi says [Evan] has a natural feeling for the controls and for any kind of machinery...[H]e's got native ability or something when it comes to machines. You should see how he caught on about the [helicopter]! [15].

None of the cultured, well-educated Africans could match the savage who did not even know how to read a sentence.

How, then, do the authors view race in these utopias? Clearly, they ascribe the ability to destroy the world to whites. And Africans, the people the farthest from the centers of advanced technology, are saved only by this distance. Joining of the races appears out of question. The matriarch in *Drones* unleashed giant, mutated, killer-bees on Amahara's party of Africans. And In 'Lost,' hostility and racial hierarchy linger even after two centuries. However, *Bug Jack Barron* and 'Nobody Lives on Burton Street,' take place in a late 20th century America wherein King's dream of a 'human community' has failed utterly.

'Nobody' is a short story where android police and fire fighting forces are sent in by the city administrators whenever a riot is brewing. The narrator, a member of

the Force, relates how ‘...the Domestic Disturbance hit us...it was summer now—hot, sticky...’ [1]. These disturbances occurred fairly regularly and computers had been programed to anticipate them. The computer diagnosed the current mob as roughly

a lot of Psych Disorders and Race prejudice. There was a fairly high number of Unemployeds, too. We’re getting more and more Unemployds in the city now, and they’re hard for the Force to deal with [2].

The Force officer describes the crowd as ‘a dirty gray wave.’

A tall Negro came trotting toward us, moving like he had all the time in the world. He stopped in front of a wooden barbershop, tossed something quickly through the front window and whump! Flames licked out at the upper edges of the window, spreading fast...A housewife caught [the still revolving barber pole] in the side with a swipe that threw shattered glass for ten yards [3].

Android cops and firemen were dispatched to quell the disturbance. The mob ate them up.

A little old lady—probably with a welfare gripe—borrowed the ax for a minute to separate all of the fireman’s arms and legs from the trunk. Looking satisfied, she waddled away after the rest of the mob [4].

Force members were, however, not content with their own living conditions. One complained about his job saying:

It’s just that nobody’s going anyplace. Sure, we’ve all got jobs, but they’re most of them just make-work stuff the unions have gotten away with.

The narrator responded, ‘Lot of people worse off than you. Look at all those lousy Africans, living on nothing’ [5]. He thought it very short-sighted to disparage the work the Force performed. When one cop said, ‘Seems like a waste to build all this just so these jerks can tear it down again.’ The narrator replied, ‘Waste?’

It’s the best investment you ever saw. How many people were in the last bunch—two hundred? Everyone of them is going to sit around for weeks bragging about how he got him a cop or burned a building [4].

Clearly, poor, urban Black peoples’ living conditions have not improved in ‘Burton Street’ but ways of managing their anger have. Blacks live in a dystopic environment controlled, regulated and manipulated by external, non-Black, forces.

Written by Norman Spinrad, the same person who wrote ‘The Lost Continent,’ white people in *Bug Jack Barron*, even so-called radicals, use every derogatory name whites have ever hurled at Black people. Coon, buck, spade, Rastus are used so

frequently one might suspect they are endearments. Jacques Lemieux, in ‘Utopias and Social Relation in American Science Fiction, 1950–1980,’ pointed Spinrad out when noting that the mid-1960s saw ‘a changed social context that includes the struggle of Blacks for equality, the war in Vietnam, the counter-culture, and, following soon after, the ecologist and feminist movements.’ The character Jack Barron, he says, lives ‘in a world where the late-1960s’ political and cultural ideals have been co-opted and marginalized almost beyond recovery by an unassailable alliance of capitalism, the political process, and the media’ [10].

In Bug, white, former UC Berkeley radical, Jack Barron, runs a television talk show where callers can voice their complaints about society. Barron’s special talent is to put the complainant into live, instant televised contact with his or her nemesis—even with US Senators and Presidents of major corporations. Black people are the back drop for Barron to save both the United States and, in particular, adolescent Black Americans, from Benedict Howard’s Foundation for Human Immortality that drains and transforms children’s life force into eternal life for rich adults. African America remains powerless, ineffectual, and in gross poverty in the post-1970 world envisioned. Lucky for them, however, Jack is on their side. He ‘knows it all—knows Harlem, Alabama, Berkeley, North Side, Strip City, knows it all...and knows what the fuck but can’t stop caring, the outsider’s insider’ [28].

From the very first page Barron is contemptuous of Black politicians

Malcolm Shabazz, Prophet of the united Black Muslim Movement, Chairman of the National Council of Black Nationalist Leaders, Recipient of the Mao Peace Prize, and Kingfish of the Mystic Knights of the Sea was neither more nor less than a nigger [29].

Of his best friend, Luke Greene, now the first Black Governor of Mississippi, Barron says:

[A] junkie don’t give a shit about anything but junk. Power and smack—it’s all the same junk...There [Luke Greene] is, stuck in the Mississippi boohnies, the poor lonely fucker, surrounded by sycophants and plain ordinary schmucks, hating every minute of it, hating himself, hating manipulating people...All that race-put-down come-on—only it’s real. He hates himself for being a nigger, thinks of himself as a nigger surrounded by niggers. Luke Greene—there was a beautiful cat, my best friend, and now look at him, hating himself, hating everything, nothing but a big throbbing vein to feed the power-monkey on his back [31].

Barron speaks ill of his ‘friend’ Luke Greene but, in contrast, becomes enraged when Benedict Howard, his nemesis, defames Greene. Barron bellows hypocritically:

[W]hile I don’t give a shit about Luke’s politics, he is an old friend of mine, and if you call him a coon or a nigger to my face again, I’ll kick your ass all around this office [30].

No Black people seem laudable in this book, but their country-ways are open to ridicule. Barron describes a caller to his Bug Jack Barron program:

the gray on gray-image of a wasted Negro face, uncombed semi-[n]appy hair, black on black jaw-stubble shadow, over a fancy fifty-dollar gold-filigree-collared sport jac half unbuttoned revealing a torn old T-shirt, semifocused watery eyes staring across the monitor at his living-color image in an obviously advanced state of alcoholic stupefaction [33].

These are the people governed by Lukas Greene, or, as Barron sometimes calls him, Rastus or Rufus. Luke deemed Barron ‘The Black Shade,’ a friend to those who have no friend, a real soul brother. He’s not black, but he’s not white either; he’s a zebra [35].

The Mississippi crowd reminded Jack of the old Civil Rights days,

being dirt-poor-black in white man’s country... *deja vu* crows in Meridian, Selma, a hundred sullen Southern towns yelling in anguish surrounded by rednecks dogs cops prods hoses...[it’s] not a game to these poor fuckers, it’s the real nitty gritty, and how can I give ‘em one more kick in the balls when even Luke’s using’ em? [35].

Evidence of Luke’s dishonor was the new capital city of Mississippi, a

soaring cluster of Space Age buildings—the Capital, the Governor’s Mansion, office buildings for carpet bagging black Baby Bolshevik parasites...rent-paid plantation house, Massah Luke...Feel that two-hundred-dollar suit you’re wearing...and everyone calls you ‘Governor’ or maybe ‘Bwana’ [37].

Jack’s ultimate goal was reminiscent of Moylan’s ‘human community’:

That’s where it should be in the United States—black shades and white Negroes, Americans, all of us, is all, and none of us, black or white, should ever even have to think about it [36].

These Black Mississippians were so long impoverished they had lost morality. For example, after his wife’s death, Henry George Franklin sold his daughter because, he said,

Thas what I mean, see? Don’t seem like a fair trade, do it, a woman for a daughter? Daughter eats almost as much as a woman, but it’s like keeping one of them there parakeets, just eats and jabbars and don’t do nothin’. Means y’can’t even afford another woman, not regular like. So it just makes good sense, you stuck with a useless mouth to feed, somebody makes a real nice offer, sensible man’s gotta take it and sell her [34].

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391 But Franklin was not the only one to take the bait. Jack found

392 Four new cars outside four traditional Southern niggertown shitholes, ranging
393 from a Buick to an honest-to-Christ Rolls...and that incredible dumb motherfucker
394 actually believed his kid was now the adopted heir to the kingdom in some non-
395 existent black African state [38].

396 Thus, Jack Barron came to the rescue. He figured out how the children had been
397 used and put an end to it. He was the logical one to do it because, as Rastus Gov.
398 Green said:

399 You're a hero down here, a hero in the Village and Harlem cause you're the one
400 cat that crawled up from the gutter to the big time without copping out, with your
401 brains and your mouth and not on a ladder of dead bodies [32].

402 Green suggested Barron run for President of the United States with himself as
403 Vice President. This would be good because:

404 [O]nce we get a Negro in the White House, even by the back door, nothing'll
405 ever be the same [39].

406 *Bug Jack Barron* presents Black people in a dystopia with absolutely no agency.
407 Even those who have 'apparently' made good are described as traitors to the race
408 and class from which they derive their authority. In addition, the author, in both this
409 and in 'Lost', debases Black people with the insulting language used to describe the
410 white protagonists' attitude toward them.

411 Martin Luther King, Jr is spinning in his grave if there is any dream of 'human
412 community' in these dytopias. In 1967, King worried that whites opposed movement
413 toward the 'human community'. The Negro, he said, "remembers that with each
414 modest advance the white population promptly raises the argument that the Negro
415 has come far enough. Each step forward accents an ever-present tendency to back-
416 lash" [6]. Well-known fiction and non-fiction author Tom Wicker may provide the
417 best understanding of why "this mind-set existed at a time when the largest move-
418 ment for democracy in the United States in the 20th century was taking place." In
419 *Tragic Failure: Racial Integration in America*, Wicker says,

420 By 1966 opinion surveys were showing a startling reversal: Three quarters of
421 white voters thought blacks were moving ahead too fast, demanding and 'being
422 given' too much, at the expense of whites. As white backlash mounted, polls the
423 next year suggested that 'the number one concern' of most respondents was fear
424 that black gains would damage the well-being of whites. And as the decade con-
425 tinued, blacks rioting in the cities—fearfully or angrily watched by a nation
426 becoming addicted to television—and blacks raising clenched fists in the black
427 power salute seemed not only threatening but ungrateful for white 'concessions'
428 (as whites tended to see changes in the old racial order) [40].

It is due to white peoples' fear and feelings of having been 'stabbed in the back' by ungrateful Black Americans that application of Moylan's critical utopia encounters such a mixed bag in this transitional period. While the 'limitations of the utopian traditions,' are rejected, these texts quite forcefully reject utopia as a blueprint. Rather than preserve it as a dream, they recast it as a nightmare.

Thus, at the nadir of America's 20th century race relations, while admitting the danger that whites, not Blacks, might, through ineptitude, destroy the entire planet, these utopias postulate that Blacks are and will remain intellectually inferior to whites, that animosity between the races will continue, and that creation of the 'human community' will remain nowhere on the horizon. These works defy Lancaster's notion that with the coming of the critical utopia, "Utopian thinking becomes a way of connecting the present with both the past and with possible futures, playing the old off the new in a distinctly collective manner" [9].

As dystopias, these are far from perfect societies. They do not respect, as Moylan's critical utopia concept implies, 'expressions of oppositional thought,' nor do they include the 'unveiling, debunking, of both the genre itself and the historical situation.' Despite global cataclysm, there does remain the "presence of difference and imperfection within utopian society itself..." [18]. These utopias imagine a dismal future for race relations in America and even in the entire world. They go far beyond mere criticism and scream loudly for change.

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